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Collie Connection

Winter 2024/2025

*PUBLICATION COVER PAGE
ENTRY IS FOLLOWING
New Versatility Champion!!!*

Mistletoe

VCH Mountainside Mistletoe From Aryggeth, RI, TDX, HXAd, NAP, NFP, NF, BCAT, SOCII, CGCA, CGCU, TKA, THDN, TDI, FDC, ATT, VX, ROM-P, maj. ptd.

By Joany White

When 5-month-old Mistletoe came to me, I googled the definition of "Mistletoe" and found "a symbol of love and a natural pest" -- such a perfect description of my favorite adorable rascal ever since the moment I met her at Dona

Williams' home, where Boone and I had stopped for a quick head trim before our National in Wyoming. While Dona trimmed Boone right next to the fenced-in puppy play area, Mistletoe wiggled her nose in the lattice fencing, trying to get through and visit me.

"She's just too smart and is usually getting into trouble," described Dona. "My favorite kind of puppy!" I replied. "We'll name her Joany, and you can take her with you right now!" But Boone and I were on our way to Wyoming to visit my daughters, then go to the National and compete in the 4 venues of the Most Versatile Collie competition, so I didn't want Boone to be distracted. Also, his mom had passed

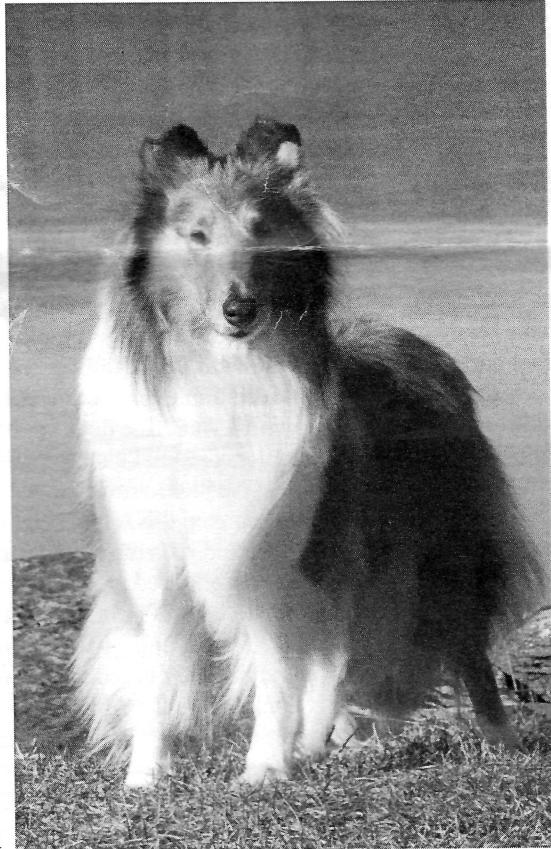
a few weeks before our visit to Dona, and I was fine with having just Boone. But 2-year-old Boone cried and howled every day at home until our trip. Although he did great at our National (placing 7th of 19 MVC qualifiers), his daily sad howling started back up as soon as we got home, so I thought back to Dona's darling love bug who was such a fun and pretty wild child, plus I loved her chest and beautifully fluid movement. I also adored her

baby picture, before her eyes opened, that friend and co-breed Anna Shook gave me. While all of Mistletoe's 8 siblings were sound asleep, Mistletoe was up on her front legs, looking for adventure. Sometimes I think I should have named her 'Where's the Party?!'

Taylor brought her while east for some New England specialties, so I picked her up and took her to her first tracking lesson, which she loved! When we checked into the motel that night, she was so cute discovering herself in the mirror for the first time!...and playing with the toilet paper. During our first night with the 3 of us together in the motel room, I kept an eye on Boone and Mistletoe, wondering how they'd get along. They acted as if they'd known each other forever!

Whew! As soon as Boone woke up the next morning, he came to me and gave me that "I have something to tell you" look. He was smiling, his ears were back, his tail was wagging his whole body, and he told me how happy he was that Mistletoe was part of our family! That made 3 of us!

I love to challenge my pups to build their confidence, ask them if they like different activities, and build trust by presenting them with new



Finding The Right Dog For Therapy Work

By Ted Slupik

It takes a special dog to excel at animal assisted therapy work. If you are lucky enough to find one who will teach you to be a better therapy dog handler, you can create a legacy. Sometimes you do not initially recognize it, but if you watch closely and observe the dog's innate abilities, you can build on their spirit and create a truly amazing therapy dog.

What do good therapy dog candidates do naturally? You will know you have found your special dog if you can answer yes to most of the following questions?

1. Does your dog initiate contact to visit with people and wants to visit? Sometimes it takes a dog a few nudges to get a reaction, but a good therapy dog is patient and tries until they succeed.
2. Does your dog have a keen sense of someone's need and can pick the one person in the room who needs attention and compassion the most?



3. Is your dog able to distinguish work from pleasure and be laser focused when they are working in what I call the "therapy zone"?
4. Does your dog gain more of their reward from praise and not treats?
5. Does your dog not startle by any situation or noise whether they are put in a small or large group? Will they correct immediately and revert to the "therapy zone"?

6. Is your dog even tempered and does not let a rejection or a poor reaction from a visit affect their demeanor? If a visit does not go well with one individual, the dog should start the next visit with a clean slate as if the last visit did not happen.
7. Can your dog act as a best friend to the person they meet, even on the first visit?
8. Can your dog be a leader and demonstrate exemplary behavior to other dogs in training or visiting at the same time?
9. Does your dog exude confidence and realizes every day is a gift?

I was fortunate that I was able to spend 13 years of my life with my rough coated collie therapy dog, Sophie, at my side. When Sophie came into my life, I had no idea what was involved with therapy dog work or how to visit with people. Through her instinctive ability, she actually taught me to become a better therapy dog handler. Sophie knew when to enter a room to visit or when to leave. She sensed everything and noticed the feelings and emotions of the people that we visited. She created a memory with people that was long remembered.

Here are a few things I learned and have applied this knowledge to my 3 subsequent therapy dogs over the span of the last 22 years. I have also become a tester and observer

of over 100 dogs for a national therapy dog organization. My personal experience has helped me with this process. Some of the important attributes to look for in a therapy dog are those that I found in Sophie are:

1. Find a dog who is more interested in praise versus a dog treat. I have never used treats during any training I have done. Using treats, although it elicits compliance, can



create a situation where dogs will sometimes not work unless a treat is available.

2. Reward extraordinary behavior with a special word of praise and use it often. This should not be an everyday word but should be more likely a word only used by you. I use the word "excellent" to let my dogs know that they are doing the right thing. Eventually, the dog will be happiest and do their best in order to hear your special word.
3. Take the time to train and work with your dogs at the earliest possible age. I spent an hour almost every day training Sophie during the first year of her life. As a puppy, it might have been a simple exercise of walking around the yard, moving away from her, and calling her to me. This was a huge time commitment but if you spend the time, you will be rewarded with an amazingly connected dog.
4. The more you train and use the same consistent method, the faster the dog learns. Sophie would learn to do a specific behavior after showing her only once or twice. She was very excited to learn more, with her only reward being praise.
5. Sophie was able to learn and have her own critical thought process. Many dogs cannot do this but if they



can, their behavior is an amazing thing to watch. One time, I threw a tennis ball and a Frisbee at the same time and asked her to bring them both back. I wanted to see which one she would retrieve first. Instead, she found the Frisbee and carried it to where the ball was. She dropped the Frisbee, which landed upside down, put the ball on it, carefully picked up the Frisbee and carried them back together. This is a perfect example of dog critical thinking.

6. Good therapy dogs need patience. I could call Sophie to me, put her in a "stay" and leave her for an extended period. Eventually, she could stay for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour without being released.
7. Watch your dog carefully and notice cues. A dog can become fatigued while working and if this happens, you need to be prepared to stop the therapy session for the benefit of the dog.
8. Find a dog who is more interested in people than other dogs. If that is not an inherent behavior of theirs, you will need to train for this behavior.
9. It is important to recognize your dog's intelligence and build on it. I eventually taught Sophie 60 hand signals to match the verbal commands she knew. Only the two of us knew our made-up signals. Even if you knew the standard hand signals you wouldn't know what I was asking of her as we had our own language. I could take her to the hospital to visit and patients would ask

her to do something. I could be off to the side and with a hand signal that no one would recognize and tell her to comply with the patient's request. Patients were amazed.

10. Use the talent of that special therapy dog to train other dogs in the family. There are things I taught Sophie that my 2nd, 3rd, and 4th therapy dog learned from simply watching first Sophie and then each other once Sophie was gone.



Collies are amazing comfort animals and are content to share their love, thus making them excellent candidates for therapy dog work. Their gentleness and quiet demeanor is unmatched. Although my collies' therapy dog work was not flashy or life altering, their quiet and dedicated visits make such a difference in peoples' lives, one day and one visit at a time.